DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 239 083 CE 037 936

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TITLE Perceptions of the Value of Extended Service in Horticulture. Summary of Research Series.
INSTITUTION Ohio State Univ., Columbus. Dept. of Agricultural Education.
REPORT NO OSU-SR-32
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Attitudes; *Agricultural Education; Educational Benefits; *Employer Attitudes; High School Students; *Horticulture; Parent Attitudes; Program Attitudes; Secondary Education; *Student Attitudes; Summer Programs; Teacher Responsibility; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS Ohio

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of vocational horticulture students, parents, horticultural industrial employers, and school administrators concerning the value of extended service contracts (summer programs) in horticulture. Twenty schools were randomly selected from the 66 Ohio secondary schools having vocational horticultural programs, and students were given questionnaires. From these questionnaires, five were selected from each school; five parents and five employers of students received questionnaires; all the teachers and administrators at each of the schools received questionnaires as well. Of the numerous results obtained from the analysis, the most significant were the following: (1) parents, vocational horticultural students, and employers all responded that the summer program is an important part of the vocational horticultural program; (2) all four groups perceived of teachers as engaging in activities of supervising students' summer employment, advising summer Future Farmers of America activities, working with horticultural industrial employers, contacting community leaders, and updating and repairing school equipment; (3) students did not respond as strongly as parents and employers that knowledge and experience obtained during the summer were not obtainable during the school year; (4) frequency of teacher visits to job sites were viewed differently by students and employers, possibly because teachers paid more attention to employers than to students; and (5) all groups responded that the extended service contract should be continued even if federal/state monies are withdrawn. Recommendations were made to increase knowledge of the summer program and to open lines of communication among the groups involved. (KC)

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PERCEPTIONS OF THE VALUE OF EXTENDED SERVICE IN HORTICULTURE

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INTRODUCTION

The extended service contract/summer program has long been an integral part of vocational agriculture programs. As vocational horticulture evolved as a specialized vocational taxonomy area, a summer program evolved with it. Extended service has been more or less considered traditional. However, the need for twelve month programs in vocational horticulture is being challenged by superintendents and other educational leaders. With less money available for school systems, superintendents are looking for places to economize and the extended service contract/summer program must be justified to administrators who would trim their budget by eliminating such contracts.

Many studies substantiate the opinion that a summer program is positively related to a good total program (Miller and

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Parks, 1981; Arrington, 1981; Cepica 1979; Ford, 1970); however, "the information to date represents opinions of the profession and status reports of what is being done" (AVA Agriculture Education Division Research Committee's Subcommittee on Twelve Month programs, 1979). Within the vocational agricultural education profession, summer programs are clearly both beneficial and vital to vocational horticulture programs. With the aim of a vocational horticulture program being the preparation of students to fulfill the needs of a particular area, the perceptions of industry of a mandated portion of the program are important. Parents of vocational horticulture students are seldom asked about vocational horticulture programs and they could possibly witness some of the greatest effects of the program. Their support as taxpayers is necessary in this era of financial trimming. The vocational horticulture students are the direct benefactors of the extended service/summer program. Supervisors of vocational horticulture teachers should also be keenly aware of the summer program and its viability. How a supervisor perceives extended service time can impact on the program itself. Students', parents', administrators', and future employers of the students' perceptions of the summer program have not been widely explored.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this research was to explore perceptions concerning the value of extended service contracts in horticulture of vocational horticulture students, parents, horticulture industry employers and school administrators. An awareness of what these people perceive can only help vocational agriculture educators better defend extended service/summer programs to the administrators who question its value.

METHODOLOGY

The procedures used to assess the perceptions of each of four groups were descriptive survey research procedures.

Respondent Selection and Data Collection

Four groups of respondents were included in this survey: students, parents, administrators and employers. Using a table of random numbers, twenty schools were randomly selected from the 66 Ohio secondary vocational horticulture programs listed in the 1980-81 Ohio Agricultural Education Directory. Schools served as the sampling unit for a randomized cluster sampling procedure. Instructors at each school were contacted by telephone and asked to participate. A date for a visit to the school was arranged; during this visit, students filled out the questionnaire and provided the names and addresses of their parents; administrators received a copy of the administrator's questionnaire and a preaddressed stamped return envelope; and each teacher provided the names and addresses of five employers of his or her students. Following the school visit, the student questionnaires were numbered and a table of random numbers was used to select five student

questionnaires from each school. The list of parents was also numbered and a table of random numbers was used to select the five parents who would receive surveys. (Five questionnaires per school were used to eliminate possible skewing of the data by a large number of students in a single program.)

Instrumentation

Four parallel instruments were developed by the researcher through interviews with teacher educators and discussion questions used in a previous extended service study (Parks, 1980). The questionnaires contained 15 to 20 Likert-scale items and a five-response ranking item. As a check of content validity, a package containing a copy of each survey was submitted separately to a panel of experts.

Data Analysis

The instrument and responses of each subject were coded and statistically analyzed with a weight of "4" for strongly agree to "1" for strongly disagree. Chi-square values were calculated for selected items which corresponded across questionnaires. Correlations were calculated among and between the groups on the item dealing with rank ordering the benefits of the summer program.

FINDINGS

Chi-square analysis was completed for fourteen survey questionnaire items which were parallel across two, three or all four groups (Table 1).

Table 2 presents the mean responses by group for each item in the ranking of benefits section. In this section, respondents were asked to rank from 1 (highest) to 5 (lowest) potential benefits students receive from having their teacher available during the summer months. The Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (W) described how the rankings of the groups varied together as .54. This is a substantial correlation among groups. Spearman rank-order correlation coefficients (ρ) are presented in matrix form for between group comparison (Table 3). The very high correlation between students and parents (.90) would indicate that they vary together in their rankings and that by knowing one, the other could be predicted ($r^2 = .81$).

TABLE 1

MEAN RESPONSE OF GROUPS ON SELECTED CORRESPONDING ITEMS

Item	Group	Mean
The vocational horticulture teacher has a summer program of activities (extended service) and is employed beyond the regular school year.	Students	3.04
	Parents	3.00
The teacher makes contacts with community people (business people, leaders, horticulture industry) during the summer.	Students	3.10
	Parents	3.12
	Employers	2.83
Summer FFA activities are an important part of the FFA program.	Students	2.81*
	Parents	3.25
	Employers	3.14
	Administrators	2.75
The teacher updates and repairs school equipment and facilities during the summer.	Students	2.79
	Parents	2.88
	Employers	2.67
	Administrators	2.67

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Item	Group	Mean
I have gained experience and knowledge during the summer program that was impossible to get during the school year.	Students	2.55*
	Parents	3.04
	Employers	3.19
Summer experiences will help (have helped) me be more successful in a job.)	Students	3.04
	Parents	3.28
	Employers	3.00
The summer program is an important part of the vocational horticulture program.	Students	2.91
	Parents	3.00
	Employers	3.28
I received help and support from my teacher when he/she visits me on the job during the summer.	Students	2.49*
	Parents	3.30
	Employers	3.25
My teacher visits me often enough at my summer job.	Students	2.30*
	Parents	2.90
	Employers	2.46
My teacher works with me and my employer in outlining my summer experiences.	Students	2.29
	Employers	3.61
The teacher presents a negative image of the school.**	Students	3.15
	Parents	3.32
	Employers	3.43
The school supports the teacher's summer activities.	Students	2.73
	Parents	3.22
	Employers	2.80
Teachers are allowed to develop their summer program however they see fit.	Parents	2.91*
	Employers	2.73
	Administrators	1.58
The extended service contract (allowing for the summer activities of the teacher) should be continued even if federal/state monies are withdrawn.	Parents	2.84
	Employers	3.00
	Administrators	2.82

*p < .10, Chi Square
**Scale values were reversed for negatively stated items.

TABLE 2

MEAN RESPONSE BY GROUP OF RANKED BENEFITS OF THE SUMMER PROGRAM

Item	Mean*			
	Students (n=86)	Parents (n=22)	Employers (n=30)	Administrators (n=12)
one-to-one instruction	2.69	2.36	2.47	1.58
moral support and encouragement	1.91	2.00	2.58	4.25
the continuation of the FFA program	3.77	2.73	3.23	4.00
access to horticultural information	2.84	2.69	3.00	3.75
help in dealing with job related problems	2.88	2.55	2.10	2.33

*Lowest mean would describe the most beneficial aspect of the summer program.

TABLE 3

RANK ORDER CORRELATIONS (ρ)
BETWEEN GROUPS

Group	Group			
	Students	Parents	Employers	Administrators
Students	1.0	.90**	.27	-.15
Parents		1.0	.58	-.04
Employers			1.0	.58
Administrators				1.0

*Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance among all groups (W) = .54; $W_{(crit,\ 5,4\ ;\ .10\alpha)} = .66$

**Spearman Rank-Order Correlation

ρ (crit, 3dF, .10α) = .81

CONCLUSIONS

Of the numerous results obtained from the analysis, several were very striking. Parents, vocational horticulture students and employers all responded that the summer program is an important part of the vocational horticulture program, and that summer experiences will help the student be more successful in a job. Activities which all four groups perceived teachers' engaging in included supervising students summer employment, advising summer FFA activities, working with horticulture industry employers, contacting community leaders, and updating and repairing school equipment. Students did not respond as strongly as parents and employers that knowledge and experiences obtained during the summer were unobtainable during the school year. This could imply that students are not receiving what the other groups think they are from cooperative placement and training plans may be being misused. Students also indicated that they receive little help and support from their teacher during their summer placement; employers and parents responded with the opposite view. This is possibly due to a lack of attention during the visits to the student (more attention to the employer) at the cooperative training center by the teacher. The item related to frequency of teacher visits to on-the-job students received significantly different responses from different groups, possibly pointing to a shortcoming as perceived by students and employers who are directly involved in the visitation process. The largest difference between groups existed on the item concerning allowing teachers to develop their summer program as they see fit; employers and parents agreed with this item and administrators very definitely disagreed. Parents and employers may not realize that this is a part of administrative responsibility, or they may feel a close watch by administrators hinders a program. Students, parents and employers all perceived their school as supporting the summer program.

On the ranking of benefits item, one item consistently and conspicuously ranked low; the continuation of the FFA program ranked fifth for three groups and fourth for the other group. Employers ranked "help in dealing with job related problems" as the most important benefit and students rated this item as a least important benefit. This discrepency again raises the possibility that students are not receiving the assistance with their cooperative placement jobs that the other groups think they are.

Another noteworthy result of the analysis of the data was that parents, employers and administrators all responded that the extended service contract should be continued even if federal/state monies are withdrawn.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Knowledge of the summer program and its aims, and the teachers' responsibilities (which was lacking in the groups studied) needs to be increased.

2. Communication lines between students, parents, employers and administrators need to be opened so that there is no misunderstanding as to what is to be happening during the summer.

3. Teachers need to be more attentive to on-the-job students, more communicative with the employers, and more sensitive to the perceptions of administrators.

4. The results of this study indicate several areas for future investigation:

   - similar studies on a national level.

   - similar studies in other taxonomy areas.

   - cooperative training agreements and how they are being used.

   - the perceived value of the FFA program to students of vocational horticulture.

   - the use of FFA in vocational horticulture programs.

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SUMMARY OF RESEARCH SERIES

The summer season is a peak time for agricultural activity. This is especially true in crop production and other areas involving the plant sciences. Because of the need for students to be active during this busy season, vocational agriculture programs have traditionally utilized the summer months. Is there a need for summer instruction in horticulture? What are the opinions held by students, parents, school administrators, and employers? This study describes the values of these groups concerning summer programs in horticulture.

This summary is based on a Master's thesis completed by Larae Watkins under the direction of Larry E. Miller. Ms. Watkins is employed in industry. Dr. Miller is a Professor, Department of Agricultural Education, The Ohio State University. Special appreciation is due Christine D. Townsend, President, Agricultural Education Research Unlimited, Inc., Normal, Illinois; Larry R. Arrington, Assistant Professor, Department of Agricultural and Extension Education, University of Florida; and L. H. Newcomb, Professor, The Ohio State University for their critical review of this manuscript prior to its publication.

Research has been an important function of the Department of Agricultural Education since it was established in 1917. Research conducted by the Department has generally been in the form of graduate theses, staff studies and funded research. The purpose of this series is to make useful knowledge from such research available to practitioners in the profession. Individuals desiring additional information on this topic should examine the references cited.

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SR 32 1984